

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

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MARKEY NUCLEAR SECURITY AMENDMENT: REQUIRES EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLANS FOR NUCLEAR REACTORS Homeland Security Must Examine Emergency Evacuation Plans for New, Re-licensed Reactors

Washington, DC: Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA), a senior Member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and Select Committee on Homeland Security, today offered an amendment that was adopted in the Energy and Air Quality Subcommittee of the Energy and Commerce Committee mark-up of the Energy Bill. The amendment requires the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to consult with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) when licensing or renewing the license for a nuclear facility to ensure the adequacy of emergency evacuation plans for communities living near the facility.

"Congress just told the NRC to take its head out of the sand and recognize that terrorism must be considered in the reactor licensing process," said Rep. Markey. "The NRC and the Department of Homeland Security need to make sure the emergency evacuation plans work before giving the green light to the nuclear power industry."

In several recent rulings related to siting or re-licensing of nuclear facilities, the NRC has made the baffling decision to ignore the risk of terrorism, stating that because the risk cannot be quantified, it would just not consider it.

However, a recent report commissioned by New York Governor Pataki asked James Lee Witt, former director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, to take a look at the emergency evacuation plan for Indian Point, particularly in light of the terrorist attacks of September 11. Mr. Witt concluded that the evacuation plan did not consider the additional ramifications of a terrorist-caused radiation release, and that it could not protect the communities of people living near the reactor from an unacceptable dose of radiation in the event of a release from Indian Point, especially if the release was a fast one such as that would be expected from a terrorist attack.

In many cases, the emergency evacuation plans for nuclear facilities may not have changed to reflect changes in the population, and may not have changed to reflect the threat of terrorism we now face. By requiring DHS (of which FEMA is now a part) consultation prior to licensing or re-licensing, the Markey amendment ensures that the risks that a terrorist attack pose to the communities who live near these facilities will be considered.

The Subcommittee's Republican Members also inexplicably voted against Rep. Markey's amendment that would have increased the security of materials that could be used to make dirty bombs, and an amendment that would have prevented the resumption of civilian nuclear reprocessing in the U.S. in light of our efforts to ensure that North Korea and Iran do not use this type of technology to develop nuclear weapons.

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